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The Importance of Employment in the Acculturation Process of Well-Educated Iraqis in Finland: A Qualitative Follow-up Study

Anu Yijälä* and Tiina Luoma**

ABSTRACT

This study considers long-term adaptation among well-educated Iraqis who applied for international protection in Finland in 2015. We interviewed the participants approximately 3 months after their arrival, and subsequently after being granted international protection 1.5 and 2.5 years after arrival. We apply a theoretically constructed Benefits of Employment in Intercultural Contexts model in the context of skilled refugees to examine the role of employment in their acculturation process. We analysed the data using qualitative content analysis. Despite the difficulties faced at the beginning of the asylum and job-search processes, employment – including inadequate employment that connected an individual to a work community – enhanced participants' subjective well-being and promoted their whole acculturation process. The key explanation seems to lie not in increasing economic wealth but in the establishment of social networks, a sense of collective purpose, a possibility to maintain a positive identity, and importantly, the accumulation of cultural capital that employment or active functioning in work-life-related contexts enabled. By the end of the follow-up period, the aforementioned latent benefits of employment were more salient, while the urge to manifest benefits, i.e. salary, had lessened due to reconciling with having to make ends meet with the help of social benefits.

KEYWORDS: immigrant acculturation, asylum-seekers, economic adaptation, subjective well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2016, almost 66 million people globally were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflicts and violence, or human rights violations. Nearly 22.5 million of these

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people were living outside their countries of origin.¹ At the height of the European refugee crisis in 2015–2016, a large number of people entered Europe searching for a safer life, and the number of asylum-seekers grew exponentially also in the Nordic countries. In Finland, the immigration authorities received 32,476 asylum requests in 2015, of which no fewer than 20,485 (i.e. 63 per cent) were from Iraqis, compared to approximately 3,100–3,700 asylum requests in 2012–2014.²

The large influx of asylum-seekers in 2015 created tensions, particularly among those Finnish natives who held negative attitudes towards “welfare migrants” or “passive social benefits receivers”, as immigrants with refugee backgrounds are often called, especially among populists.³ In December 2015, the Finnish right-wing government tightened its asylum policy and the requirements for obtaining residence permits based on asylum. A similar kind of polarisation of natives’ attitudes and a tightening of immigration policies has been witnessed in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway since 2015.⁴ One reason for the increasing negative atmosphere towards immigration is the fear that newcomers will not find their place in the Finnish labour market regardless of comprehensive integration support offered by the State and municipalities.

Immigration is widely accepted as one of the most stressful events in life. This is even more so for asylum-seekers, whose journey to the north of Europe has been anything but easy.⁵ Moreover, asylum-seekers may simultaneously undergo numerous other life events recognised as extremely stressful: job loss, major illness or injury, death of a loved one, or divorce.⁶ In the new country, however, immigrants are again faced with a variety of challenges posed by a new culture and encounters with its representatives. In addition, employment difficulties in the new country may create stress,⁷ particularly if combined with experiences of unequal practices or discrimination in the labour market.⁸

In this study, we explore the economic adaptation process of well-educated Iraqis who were granted international protection in Finland, and the ways in which

- 1 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Figures at a Glance*, Geneva, UNHCR, 2017, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html> (last visited 15 Apr. 2018).
- 2 Finnish Immigration Service, *International Protection*, 2015, available at: https://migri.fi/documents/10197/5798793/65019_Tilastograafit_2015_EN_final.pdf (last visited 15 Jun. 2018).
- 3 S. Keskinen, “From Welfare Nationalism to Welfare Chauvinism: Economic Rhetoric, the Welfare State and Changing Asylum Policies in Finland”, *Critical Social Policy*, 36(3), 2016, 352–370; A. Yijälä & M. Nyman, *Living in Limbo. Qualitative Case Study of Skilled Iraqi Asylum Seekers in Finland*, Helsinki, City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Research Series 2017:1, Jan. 2017.
- 4 See T. Etzold, *Refugee Policy in Northern Europe. Nordic Countries Grow Closer but Differences Remain*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP Comments 1, Jan. 2017.
- 5 Yijälä & Nyman, *Living in Limbo. Qualitative Case Study of Skilled Iraqi Asylum Seekers in Finland*.
- 6 See, for instance, S. Cohen, M. L. M. Murphy & A. A. Prather, “Ten Surprising Facts about Stressful Life Events and Disease Risk”, *Annual Review of Psychology*, 70, 2019, 7.1–7.21; D. Cantekin & T. Gençöz, “Mental Health of Syrian Asylum Seekers in Turkey: The Role of Pre-migration and Post-migration Risk Factors”, *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 36(10), 2017, 835–859.
- 7 See, for instance, J. W. Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 46(1), 1997, 5–68.
- 8 K. Liebkind, L. Larja & A. Brylka, “Ethnic and Gender Discrimination in Recruitment: Experimental Evidence from Finland”, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 4(1), 2016, 403–426; T. Koivunen, H. Ylöstalo & K. Otonkorpi-Lehtoranta, “Informal Practices of Inequality in Recruitment in Finland”, *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 5(3), 2015, 3–21.

employment relates to their well-being. To do this, we combine the immigrant acculturation and adaptation frameworks⁹ to the deprivation theory of unemployment.¹⁰ The concept of psychological acculturation describes the psychological changes an acculturating individual experiences as a result of coming into contact with a new culture, and this process can lead to either more or less favourable adaptation outcomes.¹¹ Unsuccessful psychological acculturation caused, for example, by employment difficulties may lead to various kinds of problems, such as emotional disturbances stemming from social malaise.¹² Regardless of the unprecedented number of newcomers seeking their own place in the receiving societies, it has been stated that there is a failure at the national and European Union levels to address the needs pertaining to the long-term integration of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe.¹³ One reason is insufficient information on long-term adaptation outcomes among beneficiaries of international protection who arrive in a new country as asylum-seekers; little is known about how the combination of traumatising experiences, mental health issues and long and stressful asylum application and work permit processing times reflect on their acculturation and employment processes if permitted to stay.¹⁴

As atypical employment increases in Western countries,¹⁵ and as especially immigrants tend to work in secondary labour markets in precarious working conditions,¹⁶ this study regards employment not only through its traditional meaning as a dichotomous construct contrasting employment versus unemployment but rather as a continuum that includes a variety of more or less adequate types of employment between these two extremities.¹⁷ In other words, we pay attention to both quantity (sufficient number of working hours) and content (employee's skills match job requirements) of employment. In contrast to adequate employment, *inadequate employment* can be defined as employment where an employee does not have enough working hours (e.g. low hours or involuntary part-time work) and/or is

9 See, for instance, Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation"; C. Ward, "The A, B, Cs of Acculturation", in D. Matsumoto (ed.), *The Handbook of Culture and Psychology*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, 411–445.

10 M. Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment. A Socio-Psychological Analysis*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982.

11 Berry, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation", 6.

12 See for a review, S. J. Schwartz, J. B. Unger, B. L. Zamboanga & J. Szapocznik, "Rethinking the Concept of Acculturation: Implications for Theory and Research", *American Psychologist*, 65(4), 2010, 237–251.

13 H. Crawley et al., *Destination Europe? Understanding the Dynamics and Drivers of Mediterranean Migration in 2015*, MEDMIG Final Report, 2016, available at: <http://www.medmig.info/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/research-brief-destination-europe.pdf> (last visited 15 Jun. 2019).

14 See, for instance, R. Naranjo Sandalio, *Life After Trauma: The Mental-Health Needs of Asylum Seekers in Europe*, Washington, DC, Migration Policy Institute, 2018, available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/life-after-trauma-mental-health-needs-asylum-seekers-europe> (last visited 15 Jun. 2019); J. Hainmueller, D. Hangartner & D. Lawrence, "When Lives Are Put on Hold: Lengthy Asylum Processes Decrease Employment among Refugees", *Science Advances*, 2(8), 2016, e1600432–e1600432.

15 See, for instance, P. Schoukens & A. Barrio, "The Changing Concept of Work: When Does Typical Work Become Atypical?", *European Labour Law Journal*, 8(4), 2017, 306–332.

16 See, for instance, N. Ollus, "Forced Flexibility and Exploitation: Experiences of Migrant Workers in the Cleaning Industry", *Nordic Journal of Working Life Studies*, 6(1), 2016, 25–45.

17 D. Dooley, "Unemployment, Underemployment, and Mental Health: Conceptualizing Employment Status as a Continuum", *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 32(1/2), 2003, 9–20.

overqualified. In this study, inadequate employment refers to situations where participants are working in jobs that do not match their skills, in involuntarily part-time or short-term jobs, or in practical work training/apprenticeships. As with unemployment, inadequate employment has been linked to impaired well-being.¹⁸

This article aims to provide knowledge on both the initial labour market access and the longer-term adaptation outcomes related to employment status among a small group ($N=7$) of well-educated, English-speaking Iraqis qualified to stay in Finland on the basis of international protection (hereinafter referred to as refugees).¹⁹ Although our sample is small, the results illustrate different paths and challenges that Iraqi refugees face during their process of economic adaptation in Finland, and how they relate to their well-being and overall adaptation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Acculturation and adaptation frameworks

The cultural distance between the Nordic welfare States and those countries from which refugees are fleeing, such as Iraq, is vast. This means that immigrants have to absorb a great deal of information in order to navigate a new culture.²⁰ Although relocating to such a culturally different country may be very demanding and stressful, it may lead to successful acculturation, i.e. a successful process of psychological and cultural change that takes place when an immigrant comes into contact with the new culture and its members.²¹ Acculturation leads to different kinds of adaptation outcomes, which can be categorised into the following adaptation aspects: *Psychological adaptation* involves psychological well-being, physical health, and life-satisfaction; *socio-cultural adaptation* emphasises acquiring the social skills needed to “fit in” with the new cultural context and successfully engage in social interactions;²² *socio-psychological adaptation*, on the other hand, relates to changes in values as well as identities and intergroup attitudes, i.e. to the manner in which people perceive themselves and representatives of other groups;²³ *economic adaptation* refers to “the degree to which work is obtained, is satisfying and is effective in the new culture”,²⁴ and it can be assessed through, for example, employment status, job satisfaction, or the need for social benefits.

This study focuses on these four aspects of adaptation among recent refugees to Finland, particularly concerning their endeavours to find satisfactory employment and make ends meet in the new country, and how this process unfolds in the new country.

18 *Ibid.*

19 For the sake of simplicity, in this article we use the term “refugee” to include participants entitled to either refugee status or subsidiary protection in Finland.

20 G. Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, London, McGraw-Hill, 1991; B. Larsen, “Becoming Part of Welfare Scandinavia: Integration Through the Spatial Dispersal of Newly Arrived Refugees in Denmark”, in K. Olwig, B. Larsen & M. Rytter (eds.), *Migration, Family and the Welfare State. Integrating Migrants and Refugees in Scandinavia*, London, Routledge, 2012, 153–170.

21 Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”.

22 See, for instance, *ibid.*; Ward, “The A, B, Cs of Acculturation”.

23 K. Liebkind, I. Jasinskaja-Lahti & T. A. Mähönen, “Specifying Social Psychological Adaptation of Immigrant Youth: Intergroup Attitudes, Interactions, and Identity”, in A. Masten, K. Liebkind & D. Hernandez (eds.), *Capitalizing on Migration: The Potential of Immigrant Youth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, 117–158.

24 Berry, “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”.

2.1.1. Predictors of economic adaptation

Several kinds of individual-level factors, such as personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, years since arrival) and acquired skills (e.g. language skills, education, work experience, job search strategies) may affect the job search process and employment among immigrants. Some of these factors may also covariate with one's cultural background – for example, although better education has been shown to facilitate economic adaptation, particularly if acquired in the host country,²⁵ for refugees, higher education does not necessarily promote their economic adaptation.²⁶ An explanation could be the higher language proficiency needed in occupations that require high levels of education, or employers' inability to recognise skills and qualifications obtained abroad.²⁷ However, the reason could also be related to discrimination that immigrants with a refugee background have reported facing more often in the Finnish labour market than other immigrant groups.²⁸

Acquiring work experience may function as a key strategy to secure adequate employment in the future, which is why employment – also temporary or inadequate employment – can be regarded as an important factor in promoting long-term economic adaptation.²⁹ Taking part in work-related activities, such as different kinds of practical work trainings, can also turn out to be a successful strategy for creating social networks.³⁰ Social support provided by social networks, considered as social capital in this study,³¹ can be crucial for both entering a new country's labour market and further career advancement; in Finland, as many as 70-80 per cent of open vacancies are so-called hidden jobs³² unadvertised in official job search channels, and only found by contacting a potential employer directly, often with the help of acquaintances.

25 See, for instance, B. Bratsberg, O. Raaum & K. Røed, *Immigrant Labor Market Integration across Admission Classes*, Discussion Papers No. 10513, Bonn, IZA Institute of Labor Economics, Jan. 2017; N. Irastorza & P. Bevelander, *The Labour-Market Participation of Highly Skilled Immigrants in Sweden: An Overview*, MIM Working Papers Series No 17:5, Malmö, Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration, Diversity and Welfare, 2017.

26 See, for instance, J. Hartog & A. Zorlu, "How Important Is Homeland Education for Refugees' Economic Position in the Netherlands?", *Journal of Population Economics*, 22(1), 2009, 219–246.

27 P. Bevelander, *Integrating Refugees into Labor Markets*. IZA World of Labor 2016, 269, available at: <https://wol.iza.org/articles/integrating-refugees-into-labor-markets/long> (last visited 30 Jul. 2019).

28 B. Bergbom, *Immigrants' and Natives' Intra- and Intercultural Co-worker Relations and Their Associations with Employee Well-Being. A Study in an Urban Bus Transportation Company*, Tampere, University of Tampere, Acta Universitatis Tamperensis, 2017, 2281.

29 A. Yijälä & T. Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoluista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen ["I Don't Want to be a Burden on Other Tax Payers, but be a Tax Payer Myself". An Interview Study on the Immigrants' Labour Market Paths, and their Perceptions of Employment as a Factor Related to their Well-Being], Helsinki, City of Helsinki Research Series 2018:2, Jun. 2018.

30 See G. Akkaymak, "Bourdieuian Analysis of Job Search Experiences of Immigrants in Canada", *International Migration & Integration*, 18, 2017, 657–674; Yijälä & Nyman, *Living in Limbo. Qualitative Case Study of Skilled Iraqi Asylum Seekers in Finland*.

31 See N. Lin, "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital", in N. Lin, K. Cook & R. S. Burt (eds.), *Social Capital. Theory and Research*, London, Routledge, 2001, 3–28.

32 Rekrytointi, *Hidden Job Market*, 2018, available at: <https://rekrytointi.com/tyonhaku/en/working-in-finland/hidden-job-market/> (last visited 15 Jun. 2019).

Social capital can be divided into bridging and bonding social capital.³³ The former, acquired through social networks that consist of inter-ethnic contacts can help an immigrant find employment outside of their own ethnic group, and particularly jobs requiring academic qualifications.³⁴ Bonding social capital, on the other hand, considers dense social ties within an ethnic group, and it promotes interaction between group members. According to Gericke et al.,³⁵ although social capital and its impact on the career development of migrants have been well researched, there is a scarcity of studies on the social capital available for refugees when entering the labour market of a new country.

2.1.2. Economic and psychological adaptation are intertwined

Different aspects of adaptation are often closely related, either through their common predictors or directly. Previous research has shown that employment enhances well-being but, on the other hand, one needs positive well-being in order to join the labour market.³⁶ Among immigrants, adversity experienced in work life, such as underemployment, has been shown to have a negative impact on their well-being.³⁷ However, the psychological state of a person may vary depending on their background. Mental disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, are more common among individuals with a refugee background when compared to the native populations and other immigrant groups.³⁸ Notably, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may cause considerable impairments in neuropsychological functions related to, for example, attention and memory³⁹ – both highly essential abilities when learning skills needed in successful labour market entry in a new culture. Remarkably, however, employment has also been shown to reduce PTSD symptoms; but whether this was the result of a stable economic situation, or some other benefits employment may provide, remains unclear.⁴⁰ Consequently, studying how employment relates to well-being in more detail, i.e. by capturing not only the financial but also more subtle

- 33 R. Gittel & A. Vidal, *Community Organizing: Building Social Capital as a Development Strategy*, California, Sage Publications, 1998.
- 34 D. Gericke et al., "How Do Refugees Use Their Social Capital for Successful Labor Market Integration? An Exploratory Analysis in Germany", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 105, 2018, 46–61. For the results in the Finnish context, A. Ahmad, "'Since Many of My Friends Were Working in the Restaurant': The Dual Role of Immigrants' Social Networks in Occupational Attainment in the Finnish Labour Market", *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 16(4), 2015, 965–985.
- 35 Gericke et al., "How Do Refugees Use Their Social Capital for Successful Labor Market Integration? An Exploratory Analysis in Germany".
- 36 See, for instance, K. I. Paul & K. Moser, "Unemployment Impairs Mental Health: Meta-Analyses", *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 74, 2009, 264–282.
- 37 See, for instance, Z. Aycan & J. W. Berry, "Impact of Employment-Related Experiences on Immigrants' Psychological Well-Being and Adaptation to Canada", *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science. Special Issue: Ethnic Relations in a Multicultural Society*, 28(3), 1996, 240–251.
- 38 For a review, M. Bogic, A. Njoku & S. Priebe, "Long-Term Mental Health of War-Refugees: A Systematic Literature Review", *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 15(29), 2015, 1–41; L. J. Kirmayer et al., "Common Mental Health Problems in Immigrants and Refugees: General Approach in Primary Care", *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 183(12), 2011, 959–967.
- 39 M. Koso & S. Hansen, "Executive Functions and Memory in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Study of Bosnian War Veterans", *European Psychiatry*, 21(3), 2006, 167–173.
- 40 C. Sonne et al., "Psychosocial Predictors of Treatment Outcome for Trauma-Affected Refugees", *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 7(1), 2016, 1–11.

benefits of employment, or lack thereof, could provide useful information on how society could better support the acculturation process among recently arrived refugees.

2.2. The latent and manifest benefits of employment

In her socio-psychological deprivation theory of unemployment, Jahoda distinguishes between the manifest (i.e. salary and other financial benefits) and latent benefits (i.e. benefits that occur as an unintended by-product of purposeful action) of employment.⁴¹ According to her, the latent benefits of employment are particularly important for well-being. In addition to engaging the employees in physical activity and creating structure for their day, employment also provides them with an opportunity to build meaningful social networks outside the nuclear family, a positive identity and status in the community. In Jahoda's words, "individualism needs to be embedded in a social context to be valued at all".⁴² Moreover, through employment, individuals can feel they are useful and needed by other people working towards a shared goal, which gives them a sense of purposefulness.⁴³ According to Jahoda's theory, unemployed people miss the latent benefits of work, which may lead to impaired mental well-being.

It has been noted, however, that some individuals may see their occupation just as a means to earn money and pay the bills, while maybe orienting themselves towards achieving goals in totally different areas of life.⁴⁴ Relatedly, Jahoda has been criticised for overemphasising the importance of latent benefits. According to her critics, rather than the deprivation of latent benefits, it is the financial strain associated with unemployment that impairs well-being the most.⁴⁵ However, systematic research considering both latent and manifest benefits of employment among the general population has shown that along with the deprivation of financial benefits of employment, the lack of time structure and social support provided by social contacts were also commonly closely associated with impaired well-being.⁴⁶

Jahoda's theory has not been systematically applied in research concerning immigrants. However, Jahoda's findings and other related empirical research get further support from the acculturation research tradition. For example, with regard to latent benefits, in addition to promoting immigrants' employment process as described previously, social support provided by one's social networks has been shown to function as a psychological resource that may enhance well-being and effectively reduce stress

41 Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment*.

42 *Ibid.*, 24.

43 *Ibid.*

44 D. Ezzy, "Subjectivity and the Labour Process: Conceptualising 'Good Work'", *Sociology*, 31(3), 1997, 427–444.

45 See, for instance, H. Ervasti & T. Venetoklis, "Unemployment and Subjective Well-Being. An Empirical Test of Deprivation Theory, Incentive Paradigm and Financial Strain Approach", *Acta Sociologica*, 53(2), 2010, 119–138; D. Fryer, "Psychological or Material Deprivation: Why Does Unemployment Have Mental Health Consequences", in E. McLaughlin (ed.), *Understanding Unemployment: New Perspectives on Active Labour Market Policies*, 2nd edn., London, Routledge, 2002, 103–125.

46 J. Muller, P. A. Creed, L. E. Waters & M. A. Machin, "The Development and Preliminary Testing of a Scale to Measure the Latent and Manifest Benefits of Employment", *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 21(3), 2005, 191–198; J. Muller & L. Waters, "A Review of the Latent and Manifest Benefits (LAMB) Scale", *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 21(1), 2012, 31–37.

during the acculturation process,⁴⁷ thus promoting psychological adaptation. When it comes to the manifest benefits of employment, economic hardship among refugees has been shown to predict poorer overall health and symptoms of psychological stress, such as insomnia and depression.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Yijälä and Luoma⁴⁹ showed that, in addition to well-being (i.e. psychological adaptation), adequate employment in particular also promoted socio-psychological adaptation among different groups of immigrants studied by providing a possibility to construct their identity through becoming a part of a meaningful reference group in their work community, and thus maintaining/developing their professional identity.⁵⁰ Willott and Stevenson⁵¹ have also shown that professionally qualified refugees who had arrived in the UK as asylum-seekers strongly identified themselves with their professions, which also played an important role in defining their perceived status in the community. Consequently, due to the challenges faced in the labour market of the new country, professionally qualified refugees often tend to suffer considerable loss of self-esteem, even more so than less educated refugees.⁵² Low self-esteem, in addition to seriously impairing one's psychological well-being,⁵³ can also complicate the identity construction process,⁵⁴ i.e. socio-psychological adaptation. This may lead to a situation in which an individual starts to perceive themselves as incapable of the kind of work they used to do, thus giving up their career expectations⁵⁵ and, in the worst case, totally losing hope of finding any satisfactory employment, i.e. to adapt economically.

Moreover, Yijälä and Luoma's study⁵⁶ showed that, in addition to the manifest and latent benefits that employment provided, almost any kind of employment linking immigrants to a work community simultaneously functioned as an important pathway to learning the destination country's language and (workplace) culture – in

- 47 See, for instance, I. Jasinskaja-Lahti, K. Liebkind, M. Jaakkola & A. Reuter, "Perceived Discrimination, Social Support Networks, and Psychological Well-Being among Three Immigrant Groups", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 37(3), 2006, 293–311. See also Lin, "Building a Network Theory of Social Capital".
- 48 L. Simich, H. Hamilton & B. K. Baya, "Mental Distress, Economic Hardship and Expectations of Life in Canada among Sudanese Newcomers", *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 43(3), 2006, 418–444.
- 49 Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoliista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen.
- 50 See also H. Tajfel & J. C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", in W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Monterey, Brooks/Cole, 1979, 33–47; H. Tajfel & J. C. Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior", in W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 2nd edn., Chicago, Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1985, 2–24.
- 51 J. Willott & J. Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom", *International Migration*, 51(5), 2013, 120–132.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 H. Du, R.B. King & P. Chi, "Self-esteem and Subjective Well-being Revisited: The Roles of Personal, Relational, and Collective Self-esteem", *PLoS ONE*, 12(8), 2017, 1–17.
- 54 T.R. Tyler & S. L. Blader, "The Group Engagement Model: Procedural Justice, Social Identity, and Cooperative Behavior", *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 7(4), 2003, 349–361.
- 55 See, for instance, Akkaymak, "A Bourdieuan Analysis of Job Search Experiences of Immigrants in Canada".
- 56 Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoliista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen.

other words, acquiring host-country cultural capital. According to Bourdieu,⁵⁷ institutionally recognised achievements such as academic degrees and professional titles that symbolise cultural competence but also embodied cultural skills and appropriate ways of behaving, such as language skills, are salient indications of acquired *cultural capital*. Furthermore, acquiring these culture-bound behaviours and skills in the workplace remarkably promoted immigrants' well-being and overall adaptation, including economic adaptation, to Finland.⁵⁸

2.3. The aims of the study and a theoretical model formulated to fit the immigration context

Although the positive effects of employment and the negative effects of unemployment for an individual's well-being have been reported in numerous studies,⁵⁹ there has been much less research, particularly among immigrants, on how the various forms of inadequate employment affect people's well-being and their ability to cope financially.⁶⁰

Based on the theoretical assumptions presented above, we have constructed a theoretical model that builds on Jahoda's deprivation theory of unemployment and the related research⁶¹ by taking into account both the manifest and latent benefits of employment.⁶² In this article, this model has been further developed. Consequently, we propose a "Benefits of Employment in Intercultural Contexts" (BEIIC) model that includes three additional latent benefits related to cultural learning, which are hypothesised to play a central role in the overall acculturation process: getting to know the culture, gaining experience in work-related norms and practices, and learning the language of the host country, thereby enhancing well-being (Figure 1).⁶³ Moreover, in our revised model, employment status is connected not only to well-being (i.e. psychological adaptation), as suggested by Jahoda, but also to socio-psychological, socio-cultural and economic adaptation. Different employment statuses are assumed to affect these four adaptation aspects through the latent and manifest benefits that a certain employment either lacks or provides. In the following, we will pilot this model in a longitudinal analysis of economic adaptation of well-educated Iraqi refugees. Our main research question is: "How does the

57 P. Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital", in J. G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1986, 241–258.

58 Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoluista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen. See also M. Alegría, K. Álvarez & K. DiMarzio, "Immigration and Mental Health", *Current Epidemiology Reports*, 4(2), 2017, 145–155; M. van Riemsdijk, S. Basford & A. Burnham, "Socio-cultural Incorporation of Skilled Migrants at Work: Employer and Migrant Perspectives", *International Migration*, 54(3), 2016, 20–34.

59 See, for instance, Paul & Moser, "Unemployment Impairs Mental Health: Meta-Analyses".

60 Dooley, "Unemployment, Underemployment, and Mental Health: Conceptualizing Employment Status as a Continuum".

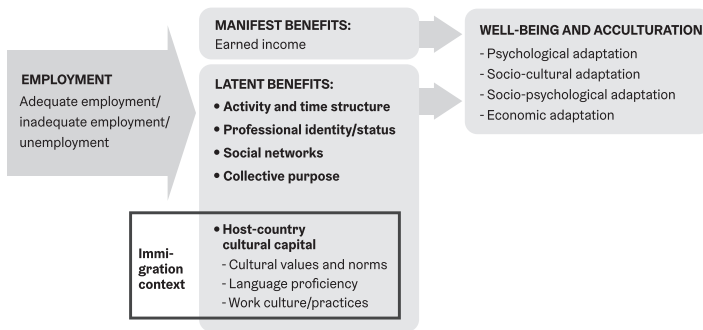
61 Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment*; Muller & Waters, "A Review of the Latent and Manifest Benefits (LAMB) Scale".

62 See Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoluista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen.

63 See also *ibid*.

participants' employment status affect their well-being (i.e. psychological adaptation) and other aspects of adaptation (i.e. economic, socio-psychological and socio-cultural adaptation)?”

Figure 1: Theoretical model illustrating the benefits of employment in intercultural contexts



3. RESEARCH CONTEXT, DATA, AND METHODS

3.1. The context of the study

Finland is a Nordic welfare State with a universal social welfare system that is geared towards alleviating social and income differences. High taxation rates are required to sustain social benefits, such as unemployment benefits and social assistance benefits, that are used to redistribute wealth to those who are either struggling with finding adequate employment or remain outside the labour force. Furthermore, special integration support is available to all resident immigrants who are seeking work or receiving social assistance benefit, and it includes the early integration services, such as the assessment of the needs of an immigrant and, if needed, an integration plan and training. A personalised integration plan covers the measures and services that support an immigrant in acquiring sufficient command of the Finnish (or Swedish) language as well as the knowledge and skills needed to become an equal member of society and take part in working life. The immigrant integration plan is usually made for no more than 3 years, but it can be extended by a maximum of 2 years if an immigrant needs more special integration measures.⁶⁴ The purpose of integration training, coordinated by the State's Employment and Economic Development Offices (hereinafter the TE office) is for rapid employment by promoting social, cultural and language skills as well as skills that facilitate access to the labour market.

Despite these measures, immigrants with a refugee background, particularly those from Iraq and Somalia, often face challenges in employment and making ends meet in Finland.⁶⁵ Relatedly, they tend to receive more social benefits, and also more often

64 Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration 1386/2010, unofficial translation, Finland, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/2010/en20101386.pdf> (last visited 15 Jun. 2019).

65 See, for instance, M. Sarvimäki, "Labor Market Integration of Refugees in Finland", *Nordic Economic Policy Review*, 7(1), 2017, 91–114.

than natives or other immigrant groups, get caught in different kinds of welfare traps, i.e. situations where accepting a job or more working hours is not economically beneficial due to difficulties in combining a small wage with social benefits received.⁶⁶

3.2. Participants, data collection, and analysis

The data was collected through follow-up interviews among a privileged group of well-educated, English-speaking Iraqis who arrived in Finland as asylum-seekers in 2015. As our main interest was in knowing how employment status relates to the overall acculturation process, it had to be taken into account that for those who cannot speak Finnish (or Swedish),⁶⁷ English proficiency is often considered a minimum requirement when entering the labour market in Finland. Moreover, as employment has been reported to be easier and faster for immigrants with higher education,⁶⁸ we chose to focus on individuals who had completed an academic degree or had substantial academic credentials and were thus expected to have an advantage over other Iraqis when it comes to finding employment in Finland.

The interviews were conducted as semi-structured, in-depth interviews in English. The participants were interviewed at three different times during their first 2.5 years in Finland: The baseline interviews (T0) were conducted from November 2015 to April 2016 when all the participants in the initial baseline study ($N = 22$; three women) were still waiting for their asylum decision in the reception centres or private accommodation in Helsinki or Turku. At the time of the baseline interviews, the participants had spent approximately 1–4 months in Finland. They were contacted through direct contact outside reception centres or at events organised by or for asylum-seekers, and through a snowball sampling technique utilising the participants' networks. In the interviews, they described, among other things, their motivation for choosing Finland, life in the reception centres as well as experiences and expectations regarding psychological, socio-cultural, socio-psychological, and economic adaptation in Finland.⁶⁹

For this article, we focused only on the interviews with those participants ($N = 7$; three women) who were subsequently legally permitted to remain in Finland on the basis of either refugee status or subsidiary protection, and thus could be re-interviewed at two further different time points: the first in March–May 2017 (T1), and then in March–April 2018 (T2) (i.e. a total of 21 interviews, each one lasting approximately 40–120 minutes). At T1, the participants had spent approximately 1.5 years, and at T2 2.5 years in Finland. In the interviews, the participants described

66 See, for instance, J. Hansen & M. Löfström, "The Dynamics of Immigrant Welfare and Labor Market Behavior", *Journal of Population Economics*, 22(4), 2009, 941–970; M. Sarvimäki, "Assimilation to a Welfare State: Labour Market Performance and Use of Social Benefits by Immigrants to Finland", *The Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 113(3), 2011, 665–688.

67 In Finland, there are two official languages, Finnish and Swedish. However, Swedish is mainly spoken in municipalities along the southern and western coastline as well as in Helsinki Metropolitan area.

68 Irastorza & Bevelander, *The Labour-Market Participation of Highly Skilled Immigrants in Sweden: An Overview*.

69 See Yijälä & Nyman, *Living in Limbo. Qualitative Case Study of Skilled Iraqi Asylum Seekers in Finland*, for the detailed description of the data collection procedure and the results among the 22 participants at T0.

how their employment status had developed over time and how it related to their subjective well-being and overall adaptation in the new country.

Since the interviewing researcher for the study conducted all the interviews, the relationship between the participants and the interviewer was based on mutual understanding and trust.⁷⁰ The participants were informed about the purpose of the data collection and the voluntary nature of the study, and they were assured that their anonymity would be guaranteed. It was also stressed that any question could be left unanswered without any need for further explanation.

Our aim was to describe and communicate the participants' subjective experiences during their first years in Finland, which is why we analysed the data using a qualitative content analysis.⁷¹ Content analysis involves identifying core consistencies and meanings in the data, and the analysis starts by developing a manageable coding scheme.⁷² Accordingly, we coded the transcribed interviews with the help of Atlas.ti software in order to find statements about the study's key themes as well as classifying the information into several subcategories. Some quotes used in this article have gone through minor editing (e.g. deleting repetitive or excess filler words) for the sake of clarity for the reader.

At the time of the first interviews (T0), the study participants were 21–31 years old, with a mean age of 26.6 years (SD = 7.43). One held a Master's degree and five had Bachelor's degrees from Iraq. In addition, one had studied for more than 2 years at a university without completing a degree.

4. FINDINGS

In the following results section, we first briefly describe the situation of the study participants at the time of the first interview to give the reader a perception of the difficult situation they were in, i.e. entering the country but still not knowing whether they could stay or not (T0). After this, we look at their personal job-seeking and employment experiences more closely, regarding the results obtained during the time of their initial labour market entry (T1), and after spending a longer time in Finland and the labour market (T2).

4.1. Baseline: Waiting for the asylum decision and work permit while receiving social benefits without doing anything in return creates distress

At the time of the first interviews (T0), the participants still noticeably suffered from experiencing war, a challenging journey and uncertainty related to the asylum process. Although the participants were highly motivated to start working immediately, they were outside the labour force due to lacking the necessary work permit – a certificate of identity from Iraq enables one to start working 3 months (without the certificate, 6 months) after being registered as an asylum-seeker in Finland. Many experienced the waiting period as an extremely stressful phase in life. Without having many possibilities to stay active and avoid overthinking, different kinds of unhealthy

70 We want to thank Maria Nyman, M.Sc., for conducting the interviews for this study.

71 See M. Q. Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3rd edn., Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2002, 47–50.

72 *Ibid.*, 453, 463.

behaviours emerged, which were often dealt with by taking antidepressants or sleeping pills.⁷³

All participants described having a lower standard of living in Finland compared with Iraq. They had to survive on a monthly reception allowance of €92–316, depending on whether they were provided free meals. Accepting the reception allowance, however, caused mixed feelings among them. Although they felt grateful for the help provided, receiving money without doing anything in return was described as humiliating – the Nordic welfare state model is unknown in Iraq. As a consequence, the participants were having a hard time trying to understand why they could not work at least in return for the social security benefits received as, in their opinion, the reception allowance would only serve a purpose for those who could not work due to some physical or mental disabilities.

I don't want to depend on just social payments. It's not very good for me. It's good to make [keep] my life going, but it's not my goal to stay on social services. I think it's a bad idea. My feeling is this is a temporary situation for me. I have to take it, but not always. It's not a good feeling to take this money.

At that point in time, the participants comforted themselves with the thought that things would change as soon as they had been granted international protection and they could repay the help received from society by paying taxes like everyone else.

4.2. Longitudinal analysis: four different labour market paths

At the time of the second interviews (T1), the employment status of all the participants had changed from being *outside the labour force* to either unemployed (four participants) or employed (three participants) (Table 1). Of the latter, only one participant had a full-time job corresponding to his degree (i.e. was adequately employed), and two were inadequately employed: one had a part-time job and the other was doing an apprenticeship in a company owned by another Iraqi. Relatedly, the economic situation of the participants was still not as good as they would have liked. At T1, all participants, except the only one adequately employed, were struggling to make ends meet in Finland. For many, along with receiving the legal right to remain in the country, the reception allowance had been replaced by unemployment benefit or social assistance benefit, and by the housing benefit needed for their rent after moving on from the reception centres. This caused extremely negative emotions in the participants, i.e. feelings of guilt or doing wrong.

At T2, the only person working in adequate employment at T1 had become unemployed. In addition, three other participants were unemployed, one of them almost outside the labour force since she had given up finding a job. On the other hand, one of the participants who was inadequately employed at T1 had successfully established his own business at T2. Moreover, two more participants had moved from unemployment to inadequate employment: one had temporary work assignments and the other was attending practical work training.

73 See also J.-P. Brekke, *While We Are Waiting. Uncertainty and Empowerment among Asylum-Seekers in Sweden*, Oslo, Institute for Social Research, Report 2004:10, 2004, 26–27.

Table 1: Participant demographics and employment status in Finland

ID	Gender	Education in Iraq	Employment Status in Finland T0–T2		
			T0	T1	T2
1	Female	Lower tertiary		Unemployed	Inadequately employed
2	Male	University studies		Inadequately employed	Adequately employed
3	Female	Lower tertiary	Outside the labour force	Inadequately employed	Unemployed
4	Male	Lower tertiary		Unemployed	Unemployed
5	Male	Higher tertiary		Adequately employed	Unemployed
6	Male	Lower tertiary		Unemployed	Unemployed
7	Female	Lower tertiary		Unemployed	Inadequately employed

Regardless of the participants' individual life situations and challenges, it was possible to find similarities in their economic adaptation in Finland. In the following sub-chapters, we illustrate the four different employment paths of the participants, as they partly shared similar kinds of experiences in the Finnish labour market and perceptions of life in Finland in general. Moreover, to assess whether the theoretical model proposed (Figure 1) could be successfully exploited to capture and structure the feelings and experiences among this particular group of immigrants, we describe how the participants' perceptions of their employment status had affected their life in general and was related to their well-being in Finland.

4.2.1. *Following dreams with resilience, determination, and bonding social capital*

At T2, two out of seven participants felt they were on the right path in Finland. After unemployment or an apprenticeship at T1, they both had found work they regarded as meaningful: one had established his own business and thereby found adequate employment, and the other was volunteering and doing practical work training, defined in this study as inadequate employment, in a society she had founded with her Iraqi friends. Working had remarkably increased their well-being. Especially the inadequately employed participant, who stated that unemployment and related inactivity, as well as the lack of daily routines, had caused her anxiety and even depression, but since starting work, her health had improved significantly: She was able to keep herself active and work with people sharing the same kinds of goals.

Like last year, I don't have school, I don't have work, I don't have [...] Just some friends. It was bad for me. I didn't slept well. I take the depression medicine and those. But, you know, now when I have my [X] thing, it's better. Now I can sleep. Even if I didn't sleep, I don't feel bad because I am working or doing something for the [society X].

Within her work community, the inadequately employed participant also had a chance to be a role model for other Arabic women and so help them, which also had a positive impact on her own identity construction process. The only downside was that since inadequate employment did not provide her with sufficient income, she had to continue receiving social benefits, which, however, was not perceived as difficult as it had been before. It seems that the participant had become more accustomed to the Finnish welfare system:

For me and for my friends, I can say [...] we all don't want this money. But sometimes I'm thinking "it's okay because I don't have money". There is a very, very small opportunity to have work. So, there is Kela [the Social Insurance Institution of Finland providing social security]. But if there is an opportunity to have work, I think we don't need Kela. Maybe [Kela offers social benefits] because they know it's really hard to have work here.

The adequately employed participant, on the other hand, was happy to contribute to society by paying taxes. Finally, he was able to repay Finnish society for the help he had received during his asylum-seeking process and initial unemployment. Hence, in his case, the collective purpose provided by employment intertwined closely with the manifest benefits of work, which furthermore positively affected his well-being.

Both participants relied heavily on their ethnic networks, which, instead of formal institutions or natives, had helped them to find their own place and meaningful activities in Finland.⁷⁴ According to the adequately employed participant, integration training and services provided by the TE office could not offer him counselling that would take into account his personal aspirations, and thus promote his future employment. His proactive approach to employment proved to be one of the main keys to his success in the Finnish labour market. With his determination as well as cultural and social capital acquired in an unpaid apprenticeship offered by another Iraqi, he was able to establish his own business.

When I started working, I started from zero. I learned how I have to treat Finns and how Finns would like someone to treat them, and how you have to respect the rules. [...] In my case, the TE office sent me a lot of post, but I didn't care about them because it was like "you have to come to the school" and "you have to finish your course" [...] I just ignored them and went to work. And I learned how to speak, and the accent. So, I think it would be really better to be in touch with people and learn how to speak like them.

Working mainly with other Iraqis does not necessarily promote interaction with Finns. However, the adequately employed participant had learned cultural skills and spoken Finnish through communicating with his customers at work, which was an enormous advantage in running his own business in Finland. The inadequately employed participant, on the other hand, did not have many chances to practise her

74 See also A. Ahmad, "Connecting with Work. The Role of Social Networks in Immigrants Searching for Jobs in Finland", *European Societies*, 13(5), 2011, 687–712.

Finnish or acquire other socio-cultural skills at work. Still, even if these two participants did not have many close relationships with natives, they held a positive attitude towards their life and future in Finland.

4.2.2. *An advantage ends up in disappointment with perceived unfair treatment and bridging social capital*

Two other participants were in a situation in which their employment at T1 had turned into unemployment at T2. At T1, one of them had found a job matching his education and work experience where he could utilise his knowledge of Arabic language and culture. The other was inadequately employed in a part-time job that did not quite match her qualifications, but she was confident that her attitude and hard-working personality would help her to progress. At T1, both of them worked in a company run by natives and had Finns as colleagues, which enabled them to learn the language and other essential skills needed in the new culture and workplace:

[At work], you get to know people, how they live, how they deal with each other, how they treat foreigners. So I think it's really important to work in this country, in my job or other jobs, because you get to integrate in this society through working in this society. [...] the rules, the tax rules, the holidays, how they [Finns] are dealing with this life, it's really important. I get to know a lot of things with it, about this country.

Both also mentioned that their social networks consisted of many Finns. Acquiring bridging social capital seemed to be relatively easy for them, which is quite different to previous studies that show that immigrants, regardless of their background, find Finnish people distant and hard to make friends with.⁷⁵ Additionally, the inadequately employed participant had a strong female role model at work, which helped her to construct her professional identity in a new cultural context. The adequately employed participant, on the other hand, had achieved a respectable status among his co-ethnics as one of the few persons arriving in Finland as asylum-seekers that had succeeded in earning a living shortly after arrival: his economic situation was strikingly better than that of the other six participants.

However, at T2, both participants had become unemployed due to what they experienced as unfair treatment from their employers. One speculated that her previous employer only wanted to offer temporary help to a refugee but had no intention of hiring one permanently. According to her, the employer's reason for not continuing the employment contract was her lack of sufficient Finnish language skills, although her language proficiency had not prevented the employer hiring her in the first place. The other case regarding unfair treatment by an employer was more severe, and even went to court. Due to their experiences at work and in social relationships with Finns in general, these two participants had started to question Finnish people's trustworthiness and motives in social interactions on a more general level.

75 A. Yijälä, T. Likki, D. Stein & I. Jasinskaja-Lahti, "The Adjustment of Highly Skilled International Professionals in Helsinki", in I. Jasinskaja-Lahti & M. Laine (eds.), *Founding the European Chemicals Agency: The Perspectives of the Employees and the Authorities of the City of Helsinki*, Helsinki, City of Helsinki Urban Facts, Research Series 7, 2009, 17–113.

At T2, a notable difference between these two participants could be detected with regard to their ability to cope with unemployment and the subsequent economic strain. The previously adequately employed participant was still actively seeking new opportunities to work while also participating in various professional events and seminars. Due to the loss of his job, he had started to receive earnings-related unemployment allowance, often substantially higher than basic unemployment allowance. He emphasised how he gladly pays tax on it, contributing to Finnish society and, for him, living on social benefits did not create any feelings of shame. Instead, he rationalised that his activity and volunteering in different professional settings was actually very close to employment and, therefore, he felt he deserved the financial help he received from society. In spite of being unemployed at T2, he claimed that his well-being was higher than at T1, i.e. while he was still adequately employed, which is surprising considering the central role of employment on well-being. However, his situation at T1 might be explained by a phenomenon called the integration paradox: Well-educated immigrants, such as this participant, are aware of their unequal position and opportunities in the new cultural context and therefore even a structurally well-integrated (i.e. adequately employed) immigrant may have weak feelings of identification and belonging in the host society.⁷⁶ However, at T2, it seems that being unemployed allowed the participant to be active in a meaningful way and pursue his own personal goals. In other words, he was able to maintain his well-being through various work-life-related activities and was still able to pay a decent amount of tax.

The other participant, in spite of her initially strong work motivation at T1, was extremely unwilling to accept part-time or low-wage employment at T2. Her economic situation had clearly deteriorated since the first follow-up, according to her, mainly due to the earlier difficulties in combining the small income from her previous part-time employment and social benefits. This kind of situation is called a bureaucracy trap: Short-term or part-time employment may require lots of paperwork if one, due to the small and/or irregular salary or the end of a work contract, also needs social benefits. The large amount of bureaucracy can also delay payments of social benefits or even lead to their termination, as happened to this participant. Such a bureaucracy trap was extremely frustrating and energy-consuming, even though she regarded gaining work experience in Finland as highly important for her future employment. She stressed how bureaucracy related to the Finnish social security system kills people's motivation to work.

I really admire the system, how Kela [the Social Insurance Institution of Finland] is helping people who don't have work. But it just has been going so wrong with me only because I had work. [...] why I have been working in Finland for eleven months and suffering for three months or maybe now four [without any income]? And people, who didn't work at all, they have a more stable financial situation. For me it doesn't feel fair.

76 M. Verkuyten, "The Integration Paradox: Empiric Evidence from the Netherlands", *American Behavioral Scientist*, 60(5-6), 2016, 583-596.

According to her, worrying about how to make ends meet had been so stressful that she had been diagnosed with depression and had thus stopped seeking work: “[The doctor says] that I have depression and I am not able to feel happy and stuff like that. I can’t sleep unless I have sleeping pills because my head is busy and running all the time”. Therefore, even though inadequate employment can provide latent benefits that promote well-being, future employment and adaptation to a new country, the lack of manifest benefit, i.e. decent salary, seemed to affect the aforementioned participant’s well-being more than the latent benefits of employment: struggling with very little income can indeed occupy one’s mind.

At T1, the position of these participants in the Finnish labour market seemed to be more promising than that of the other five. Their work motivation was strong and they had strategies on how to navigate Finnish working life. Unfortunately, their determined attitude had not helped them to secure adequate employment in Finland by T2. In other words, a smooth start to economic adaptation did not lead to better long-term economic adaptation, at least not by the end of the follow-up period.

4.2.3. Deterioration of professional identity combined with negative outgroup attitudes causes disillusionment and creates feelings of being an outsider

Two other participants’ path in the Finnish labour market had been rather steady with no major alterations. At T2, they both were officially unemployed, but one had occasional work assignments, the amount of which had somewhat increased between T1 and T2, and therefore we categorised her as inadequately employed at T2. The other participant in this category had mostly been actively studying Finnish and trying to get his foreign qualifications recognised in Finland to continue his studies from Iraq. At T1, they both wanted to find a job matching their education and work experience. Their profession formed an important part of their identity, and they both perceived low-skilled entry jobs as an option only for those who do not already hold academic qualifications and/or have other professional skills. At this point, one of the welfare traps typical to the Finnish social security system, i.e. the unemployment trap, in which the amount of social benefits an unemployed person receives is so similar to the gross salary offered that it is not necessarily motivating to accept a job, affected these participants. For them, the idea of accepting low-paid and low-skilled employment did not seem attractive or economically beneficial. According to them, lot of energy is wasted in meaningless work, and it can be used more wisely in language studies, and searching for a “real” job.

However, by T2, they had realised that obtaining adequate employment in Finland was more difficult than expected. Consequently, the inadequately employed participant had applied for jobs below her qualifications – without receiving any replies. The unemployed participant considered changing to a completely different career field since he thought that his willingness to accept ethno-specific jobs could increase his chances of finding work.

As with T1, the lack of adequate employment was still a mental burden for these two participants at T2. According to the inadequately employed participant, occasional work assignments every now and then let her feel that she was doing at least something useful and purposeful. Still, in spite of working more at T2 than at T1,

she felt that her well-being was deteriorating. In addition to not having possibilities to maintain her professional identity in Finland, her whole identity construction process was threatened due to the lack of a meaningful reference group she could identify with – which negatively impacted on her socio-psychological adaptation and well-being. She had no work community from where she could acquire social support since she was conducting ethno-specific work mainly from home. Also, Finnish society and its people had remained distant, and not being able to identify herself with them, she felt like an outsider: even though she had managed to make friends with Finns at T1, disappointments in those relationships had created mistrust towards natives.

I was thinking that all Finnish people are so kind, so nice, no one wants to get benefit [take advantage] of you, no one wants to use you, all they want [is] just to help you. That's what I thought. But actually, I have to think better. [...] I was thinking that Finland could be my home country and I could live here, and I like everything here. But in fact no. People will always have that look that you are different, you don't belong in Finland. And you can feel it. [...] I am not so happy about being here. Of course, I am happy that I got a place to live in peace; and Finland is giving me more than what I give back to Finland. But still, if we are talking about society, about people, it's not so nice.

The unemployed participant had only a small amount of work experience in Finland. He spoke of having learned Finnish working culture during one practical work training, which was the only latent benefit explicitly mentioned in his interview. Overall, he rarely had any possibilities to practise Finnish with natives because of having only a little contact with them, since most of his co-workers in his previous practical work training were non-Finns, such as the other students on Finnish language courses. Neither did he express much interest in having contact with natives over time. In all, his socio-cultural adaptation proceeded very slowly, and combined with difficulties in his labour market integration, he thought that moving out of Finland could be an option for him in the future, which was the case with the other participant on this path too. They both felt there was a gap between them and Finnish society, as well as its representatives, and were not at all satisfied with their life in Finland. Achieving adequate employment and related latent benefits could possibly help them to adapt to Finland, but if they keep struggling to find a job, work opportunities in other countries probably start to increasingly attract them.

4.2.4. *Persistent willingness to make a fresh start in the labour market is empowered by bridging social capital*

One participant's adaptation process and progress in the Finnish labour market has been slightly different from that of the others. Officially, he had been unemployed during his whole stay in Finland, but by the time of the second follow-up interview, he had gone through six practical work trainings, none of which related to his education in Iraq. The following quote about the advantages of practical work training is from T1, after just finishing his third training:

[Y]ou will be in touch with the people and you will know more about the culture and you can adopt more language and you could adjust to many things. It's too useful and I think it's a really great chance to be in touch with people, since maybe offering [getting] jobs is not too easy as you are offering [getting] internship.

From the start, the participant had been aware of the fact that finding employment in his own field could be difficult and it would take a long time. He also knew that if he wanted to work in his previous profession, starting persistently from a lower level was unavoidable and climbing the career ladder would happen later.

You need to try your best [in a new country]. You need to apply [for practical work trainings]. You need to keep trying and never just say like "Okay, I'll try this one and I am not taking this one". Because at the end, as I said, it [practical work training] is a place where you can practise your language, you can meet more people and you are kind of empowering your network with people.

The participant's attitude towards working in jobs beneath his qualifications was positive. As he saw it, any kind of work could provide him with skills needed in the Finnish labour market. In practical work trainings, regarded as a form of inadequate employment in this study, he gained latent benefits of employment by learning the Finnish language and work culture, and expanding his social networks towards natives. In spite of the difficulties in developing his career and obtaining adequate employment in Finland, he had managed to stay active – presumably with the help of different practical work trainings – and to keep a positive attitude for the whole period studied. So far, inadequate employment had not deteriorated his well-being but instead had provided him with the necessary cultural skills and social capital. He had clear plans and he was confident that his future in Finland would be bright, but he knew that he would have to learn Finnish better in order to pursue his professional dreams.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The role of job-search strategies and social capital in the labour market entry

During the course of the study, it became evident that although employment was regarded as one of the most important goals in the lives of the well-educated participants, finding adequate employment was extremely difficult for them. Of the seven participants, only one was adequately employed at T1, and another participant at T2, i.e. after being in Finland for approximately 2.5 years. However, by T2 all participants had gained some experience regarding working life and culture in Finland, either through normal salary work or practical work training coordinated by TE offices or educational programmes for newly arrived asylum-seekers.

At T1, both the inadequately employed and unemployed participants were reluctant to give up the idea of finding satisfactory employment. However, by the end of the study, expectations regarding finding adequate employment and thereby coping

financially in Finland had become more pessimistic. At this point in time, the participants were probably still entitled to their integration plan, and they all had attended integration training or related language and vocational courses. For most participants in this study, however, the official employment services had not been that helpful in developing their job-search-related skills, at least not during the first approximately 2.5 years in Finland. This is interesting since the local TE offices provide immigrants with skills that ought to facilitate employment, such as career counselling and efficient job search strategies, with the help of which one should be able to also network in the direction of Finnish employers.

In this study, those who were resilient and willing to broaden their perspective underwent the acculturation process more smoothly than those who had a more passive approach towards managing the cultural differences and the new way of life – possibly resulting from their earlier failures to cope with the sudden challenges that have been brought by living in a foreign culture. However, even though being active is usually crucial when entering the labour market of a new country,⁷⁷ in this study activity, determination and a positive attitude were not always enough to secure adequate employment. Although bridging social capital has been reported to have a positive impact on immigrants' employment, particularly on jobs requiring academic qualifications,⁷⁸ initial employment in a company run by Finns, found with the help of Finnish acquaintances, turned out to be a disappointment for those two, who regardless of their strong work motivation and persistence in building a career in Finland lost their jobs due to what they experienced as unfair treatment from their Finnish employers. It has also been noted in other studies that immigrants with a refugee background face more challenges and unequal treatment as compared with natives and other immigrant groups.⁷⁹ This may imply that a glass ceiling effect for immigrants exists in the Finnish labour market affecting the career advancement of well-educated refugees.

In this study, a pro-active approach in job-seeking and career-building was clearly an asset for those two participants who found employment with the help of bonding social capital; particularly between T1 and T2, these participants took the opportunity to utilise the labour market-related knowledge and networks their co-ethnics had accumulated during the many years living in Finland. In such a situation, a lack of language proficiency and being unaccustomed to communicating skills to potential employers may not be a hindrance as it often is when seeking employment in the companies run by Finns.⁸⁰ Consequently, it seems that bonding social capital has been at least as beneficial as bridging social capital when it comes to finding a job during the course of the study.

77 See, for instance, V. Colic-Peisker & F. Tilbury, "Active' and 'Passive' Resettlement: The Influence of Support Services and Refugees' Own Resources on Resettlement Style", *International Migration*, 41(S), 2003, 61–91; Willott & Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom".

78 See, for instance, Ahmad, "'Since Many of My Friends Were Working in the Restaurant': The Dual Role of Immigrants' Social Networks in Occupational Attainment in the Finnish Labour Market".

79 See, for instance, B. Bergbom, *Immigrants' and Natives' Intra- and Inter-cultural Co-Worker Relations and their Associations with Employee Well-Being. A Study in an Urban Bus Transportation Company*.

80 See, K. Csédo, "Negotiating Skills in the Global City: Hungarian and Romanian Professionals and Graduates in London", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 34(S), 2008, 803–823.

5.2. The importance of latent benefits of employment in the long-term acculturation process

According to the results of this study, employment is connected to all four adaptation aspects studied. To summarise the findings on the relationship between employment and psychological adaptation, in line with Jahoda⁸¹ and the extensive empirical literature on the positive effects of employment on subjective well-being, also the participants in this study perceived employment as having a notable boosting effect on their psychological well-being, physical health, and life satisfaction (i.e. psychological adaptation). Overall, employment was generally regarded as the single most crucial factor for successful acculturation in a new country. In accordance with the theoretical assumptions of Jahoda,⁸² the latent benefits of employment played a remarkable role in this process: through employment, the employed participants could create social networks, feel that they are working towards shared goals and construct their professional identity and perceived status in the eyes of other people, and thereby further enhance their well-being and life-satisfaction. In addition, the physical activity that employment enforces, and also to a certain extent the time structure it creates for a day, was regarded as highly important for participants' well-being, especially when the participants were lacking these; those who had experienced unemployment-related inactivity reported having different kinds of physical and mental health problems, such as insomnia, anxiety, weight gain and a general decline in physical well-being. Inactivity was more salient at the beginning of the study, whereas alternative ways of coping with unemployment were found towards the end of the follow-up period. Overall, the participants perceived unemployment as a major cause of stress and poor well-being, which resulted from being deprived of both latent and manifest benefits of employment. However, the participants showed different ways of managing the negative effects of unemployment: some through their own non-paid activities, such as getting involved in volunteering, and others through studying or inadequate employment.

The BEIIC model, which along with psychological adaptation also includes three other adaptation aspects through which the progress of the acculturation process can be examined, proved to be a useful tool for analysing the data and organising the findings of this study. The findings of both T1 and T2 supported our rationale of integrating the three latent benefits related to acquiring host-country cultural capital as an additional block to the BEIIC model: According to most participants, employment functions as a necessary medium for more in-depth learning about the culture of the new country, including the values, rules and, importantly, the behaviour and habits of its representatives. The findings of this study are in line with the previous studies⁸³ that emphasise the importance of the workplace for learning a new language, cultural values, norms and conventions needed both at the workplace and in everyday life. While the majority of the participants in this

81 Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment*.

82 *Ibid.*

83 See, for instance, Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoluista ja työnteon merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen; van Riemsdijk, Basford & Burnham, "Socio-cultural Incorporation of Skilled Migrants at Work: Employer and Migrant Perspectives".

study saw the Finnish language as the single biggest obstacle to their employment, the workplace was still generally considered as the best place to learn the language. Those participants who preferred learning the language by working instead of the integration training saw learning profession-related vocabulary through working as more beneficial for their future employment than the content of language courses. The ability to cope with the challenges posed by the new culture was often easier and less stressful for those who had learned cultural and language skills through employment, which positively affected their well-being. In addition, acquiring cultural capital through employment promoted the participant's socio-cultural adaptation in the new country by facilitating everyday activities, practicalities and social encounters. Moreover, they had gained more understanding about equality in Finnish society as well as the freedom to express oneself. According to them, in Finland, it is also easier to question Iraqi cultural norms and think independently than it is in Iraq. For many, this had triggered a personal transformation process, including major changes in their values as well as new ways of thinking, thus affecting not only their socio-psychological adaptation but also their economic adaptation: Learning work culture and language was generally seen as crucial for future employment.

When it comes to other latent benefits of employment, in many cases, the aforementioned cultural learning had happened through engaging in social encounters with the natives in a work context. A workplace was perceived as one of the most natural and relaxed settings for creating social networks with natives, especially in case one did not have many other opportunities to mingle with them. This result is in line with the contact hypothesis:⁸⁴ the workplace offers immigrants a chance to interact with natives in circumstances where intergroup contact is usually supported by the organisation, and it happens between people of a more equal status who at least to some extent share similar interests and work towards the same goals, which may crucially reduce prejudices among the two groups. Successful contact may have positive implications not only for one's psychological adaptation, as mentioned above, but also to one's socio-cultural adaptation in a more practical sense: getting to know natives, as well as co-ethnics who are already familiar with the host country's culture and habits, are the best source of much needed information regarding issues such as the challenges met in everyday life.⁸⁵ As mentioned in the previous subchapter, social networks also play a crucial role in economic adaptation by facilitating further employment opportunities. On the other hand, unsuccessful contact, such as unequal treatment in a work community and especially by an employer, may have negative consequences on one's socio-psychological adaptation⁸⁶ – in this study, the negative attitudes held by two participants towards their employers were, at least to some extent, generalised to all Finns.

The participants' employment status in Finland was also closely related to their identity construction process (i.e. socio-psychological adaptation) by shaping how

84 G. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge, Perseus Books, 1954.

85 See, for instance, Larsen, "Becoming Part of Welfare Scandinavia: Integration through the Spatial Dispersal of Newly Arrived Refugees in Denmark".

86 See also Tyler & Blader, "The Group Engagement Model: Procedural Justice, Social Identity, and Cooperative Behavior".

they defined themselves professionally in their own eyes, i.e. their professional identity, and in the eyes of the others, i.e. status. In line with previous studies considering professional identity among professionally qualified refugees,⁸⁷ the participants of this study also often regarded their Iraqi education and previous occupation as an important part of their professional identity – perhaps at least partly due to already having to give up so many fundamental parts of their identity when leaving Iraq. In general, however, many were disappointed with the depreciation of education and work experience obtained in Iraq. Even though at T0 all participants emphasised their strong work motivation, at T1, three out of four unemployed participants refused to consider the possibility of starting work with some menial job unrelated to their education. By T2, however, they all had undergone a clear change of attitude towards accepting work not corresponding to their education. This finding is in line with the results obtained by Willott and Stevenson,⁸⁸ according to which optimism towards finding a job matching one's own qualifications may fade over time⁸⁹ and change to disillusionment. Remarkably, in their study, those participants who had become disillusioned ran a clear risk of becoming more passive about their acculturation, seeing themselves as ill-fated victims of their circumstances.⁹⁰ At T2, two unemployed and the one inadequately employed, who had only occasional work assignments with no work community, were involved in this kind of mental apathy as they could not see much improvement in their situation over time, and the disillusionment experienced was so grave that it clearly reflected on all aspects of the adaptation studied. One of them had totally lost her motivation to work due to difficulties in her economic adaptation between T1 and T2, and related health problems, and two other participants had started to think that employment could be easier to obtain in other countries. However, the other three unemployed or inadequately employed participants were still active in their own acculturation process, holding on to the idea that as long as they kept the right attitude, they would eventually succeed in becoming adequately employed.

In this study, perceiving that one works for a collective purpose helped the immigrants perceive themselves as being a part of something meaningful and having value in the community, which boosted both their well-being (i.e. psychological adaptation) and work motivation and satisfaction (i.e. economic adaptation). Specifically, a collective purpose most often took the form of being able to pay taxes but also as helping others and collaborating with one's colleagues towards a shared goal. Paying taxes is closely connected to manifest benefits, since receiving income is a

87 Willott & Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom". See also A. Vinokurov, D. Birman & E. Trickett, "Psychological and Acculturation Correlates of Work among Soviet Union Jewish Refugees in the United States", *The International Migration Review*, 34(2), 2000, 538–559.

88 Willott & Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom".

89 See also Akkaymak, "A Bourdieuan Analysis of Job Search Experiences of Immigrants in Canada".

90 Willott & Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom". See also Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, "'Active' and 'Passive' Resettlement: The Influence of Support Services and Refugees' Own Resources on Resettlement Style".

prerequisite for being a taxpayer. According to Yijälä and Luoma,⁹¹ and in line with the contact hypothesis,⁹² working for a collective purpose may also lead to positive outgroup attitudes (i.e. socio-psychological adaptation) and further to making friends with the outgroup members (i.e. socio-cultural adaptation).

According to the findings of the study, accepting a job that does not match one's education or hopes for full-time work may, however, be proven as an option worthy of trying: inadequate employment, too, can have positive effects on immigrants' well-being through the latent benefits of employment. Particularly for recent immigrants, almost any kind of employment that includes functioning as part of a work community – even voluntary work, as also suggested by Jahoda⁹³ – may bring at least some advantages, such as latent benefits related to the immigration context and potentially of great value for future employment.⁹⁴ Also, ethno-specific employment may promote the acculturation process, especially if it is conducted in a social setting: In this study, those participants who worked in ethno-specific jobs but were still part of a work community, seemed to fare remarkably better than the one who conducted such work from home and hence suffered from social isolation.⁹⁵ This finding may also relate to the importance of meaningful social reference groups for one's identity construction process: In the case of maintaining the former, valued professional identity becomes impossible in the new country, one may begin to establish a new social identity by engaging themselves as a part of a meaningful group of people, such as through their work community, which can provide them with the necessary identity-related feedback through fair treatment – thus helping them to maintain or enhance their self-esteem and well-being.⁹⁶

However, just like unemployment, when lasting for too long, inadequate employment may also start to harm one's self-esteem and cause negative feelings. On the negative side of inadequate employment is also the threat of getting stuck in different kinds of welfare traps. Hence, different forms of inadequate employment cannot become a long-term solution, since immigrants too need an opportunity to progress in their careers and earn sufficient income as well as utilise their knowledge and skills. If well-educated immigrant job seekers decide to leave Finland due to employment difficulties lasting several years or permanently exit the labour force due to losing first their hope of employment and later also their ability to work, their skills and the resources put into their integration process are wasted.

91 Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoliista ja työntöön merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen.

92 Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

93 Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment*. See also Willott & Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom".

94 Yijälä & Luoma, "En halua istua veronmaksajien harteilla, haluan olla veronmaksaja itse" – Haastattelututkimus maahanmuuttajien työmarkkinapoliista ja työntöön merkityksestä heidän hyvinvoinnilleen.

95 Jahoda, *Employment and Unemployment*.

96 H. Tajfel & J. C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict". See also Tyler & Blader, "The Group Engagement Model: Procedural Justice, Social Identity, and Cooperative Behavior".

5.3. Lack of manifest benefits of employment and adaptation towards the take-up of social benefits

Participants' self-esteem was very closely linked to earning their own living at both T0 and T1. At T1, most participants were experiencing psychological stress known as cognitive dissonance, caused by two contradictory thought patterns regarding their economic adaptation: According to the participants, the most difficult task in Finland was getting adequately employed, whereas a much easier thing to learn was how to collect social benefits if not working at all. Unemployment, combined with the need for social benefits, raised feelings of unworthiness and frustration, even humiliation among them – as also described in the study of Willott and Stevenson.⁹⁷ The lack of manifest benefits of employment impacted negatively on psychological well-being among the unemployed and inadequately employed. On the other hand, being able to pay taxes from one's own income was regarded as a highly significant milestone in the acculturation process: by paying taxes, the participants could start feeling like an appreciated member of the society.

Strikingly, after spending approximately 2.5 years in Finland at T2, the majority did not find the idea of accepting benefits psychologically all that difficult anymore, and, instead, the social security system was perceived as a source of security in life. Eligibility for social benefits had helped them to reach out to society at large so as to learn the language and new skills in practical work training and other working life-related activities without having to worry too much about their income. This kind of rather rapid attitudinal change may, however, hold either good or bad consequences. On the one hand, with the help of social benefits, participants could either take their time to find a job matching their education and work experience or study the missing skills needed for a certain job they found appealing, and this in turn could help them maintain a healthy identity and enhance their well-being. This could also pay back in the long term, as a demotivating and stressful job could negatively impact one's well-being.⁹⁸

On the other hand, if an immigrant adapts too well to receiving social benefits – namely accepts the fact that they can earn a living without working on a long-term basis – or finds the threat of welfare traps and related bureaucracy too exhausting to fight with as almost all kinds of changes in income affect the social benefits received, the social benefit system does not necessarily motivate an unemployed person to search for a job. This was reflected in the experiences of two participants. At the time of the second follow-up interview, they emphasised that the Finnish social benefit system and complicated bureaucracy related to it has its drawbacks: It drains people's motivation to work and, in some cases, it is easier and economically wiser to be unemployed than to accept a low-paid job. In this study, however, the bureaucracy trap seemed even more harmful for well-being than being stuck in an unemployment trap; in Finland, an unemployed person usually knows the amount of unemployment

97 Willott & Stevenson, "Attitudes to Employment of Professionally Qualified Refugees in the United Kingdom".

98 T. Chandola & N. Zhang, "Re-employment, Job Quality, Health and Allostatic Load Biomarkers: Prospective Evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study", *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 47(1), 2017, 1–11.

benefit, whereas combining a small salary from, say, part-time employment and social benefits can cause great uncertainty over monthly income. Notably, along with causing a financial burden for society, every situation that discourages an unemployed person from accepting employment may severely impact their well-being and slow down the entire acculturation process by depriving them of the latent benefits of employment.

To conclude, while labour market entry at T1 involved financial concerns among the unemployed and inadequately employed, by T2 the latent benefits of employment (or the lack thereof) had become more important and the urge to manifest benefits of employment had diminished due to greater acceptance of having to make ends meet with the help of social benefits.

5.4. Limitations and recommendations for further research

This study followed up on a small group of well-educated Iraqis ($N=7$), and, as such, the results are not generalisable to all Iraqis in Finland. The original sample of 22 participants diminished as only seven were granted international protection in Finland. During the time of the baseline data collection in December 2015 while the participants were still waiting for their asylum decisions, the Finnish government dramatically tightened its asylum policy, which led to a steep decline in the number of positive asylum decisions. However, as all the seven participants who were granted international protection in Finland agreed to be interviewed for three times, a follow-up study could be constructed. Even with such a small sample, the longitudinal setting was certainly an asset. The understanding of the long-term acculturation process among this particular group would have been difficult had the interviews been conducted only once instead of three times. No inconsistencies were found in the answers given at the different periods of time, which enhances the reliability of the findings.

However, in addition to the factors dealt with in this article – of which many were somehow related to the work context (e.g. different employment statuses, income, shared goals in the workplace, work culture) – many other factors too influence the well-being and adaptation of immigrants in a new country. Moreover, 2.5 years is still a relatively short time for the acculturation process, particularly when it takes place in a culture very different to one's own. Therefore, it would be extremely interesting to interview the participants again after a few more years. Overall, studies focusing on the long-term adaptation outcomes related to economic adaptation, while also taking into consideration the interplay between different aspects of adaptation, are strongly called for. A proposed BEIIC model may prove to be a useful tool for further studies conducted in different immigration and labour market settings and among various migrant groups.